

Washington State Senator • 34th Legislative District

Erik Poulsen

2006 Legislative Session Wrap-up



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Sen. Erik Poulsen represents the 34th District, which encompasses West Seattle, Burien White Center and Vashon Island. He is Chair of the Senate Water, Energy & Environment Committee, Vice Chair of the Senate Transportation Committee and a member of the Senate Health & Long-Term Care Committee.

Dear Neighbors,

Spring 2006

Thank you for the privilege of representing you in Olympia. This was a truly historic session – for civil rights, the environment, transportation, the state budget and more.

We not only completed our work on time and on budget – but for the first time in decades we finished ahead of schedule and set aside nearly \$1 billion to help fund education and health care in the next biennium, meet our state pension responsibilities, and prevent harmful cuts in the event our economy slows.

My primary focus this session was on my responsibilities as Chair of the Senate Water, Energy & Environment Committee. I championed legislation to promote our energy independence and clean, renewable sources of power such as wind, solar and biomass. Washington became just the second state to pass a law requiring more biodiesel and ethanol in our fuel supply. And I negotiated a landmark bill to provide more water for eastern Washington while helping to restore vital fish runs – arguably the biggest breakthrough in water policy in 25 years.

Another milestone: Washington became the 17th state to pass a law that bans discrimination in housing, employment and insurance based on sexual orientation. This measure will help protect the basic civil rights of all our citizens.

As Vice Chair of the Transportation Committee, I worked hard to preserve Vashon Island ferry service, keep the Viaduct project moving forward and to boost funding for transit. The Legislature required that voters have a say this November on whether to rebuild the Viaduct or construct a tunnel, and I'll stand behind their decision.

I welcome your feedback on all these issues – let's keep in touch!

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Erik Poulsen".

Senator Erik Poulsen

The Quest for Energy Independence

The past two years have produced some of the biggest environmental victories in decades. I'm proud to have served as Chair of the Water, Energy & Environment Committee during this time and excited we were able to build even further on these milestones from last session:

- Washington became the first in the nation to adopt "green" building standards for new state-funded buildings and public schools.
- We adopted tougher auto emission standards to reduce air pollution, improve the mileage of new cars and phase out emission testing.
- We passed bold new measures to encourage energy conservation and the development of wind, solar and biomass power.

Historic water legislation finally passes

For 25 years, political and legal wrangling has held up progress on one of the most critical issues facing our state: water. The governor appointed me to the Columbia River Task Force last year in hopes of breaking this logjam.

After months of tough negotiations, we forged a landmark bipartisan agreement that will increase water storage and conservation, help improve fish runs, and require mitigation for new water withdrawals from the Columbia River. It's a win-win for both the environment as well as for cities, agriculture and other industries in eastern Washington. The lessons we learn there can be applied to water issues all around the state.



Washington becomes second state to mandate more biodiesel and ethanol

I want Washington to be a leader in encouraging the development and use of biodiesel and ethanol.



This session I championed two measures that will ease our dependence on

foreign oil, help our farmers, improve air quality and create new jobs :

■ Renewable fuels standard.

Starting in 2008, all automotive fuels sold in Washington must contain at least 2 percent biofuels: either biodiesel – a fuel made from vegetable oil – or, in the case of gasoline, ethanol made from the byproduct of crops such as wheat and corn. This translates into 20 million gallons per year added to our current fuel supply. And that will gradually increase over time. The standard will assure a steady demand for biofuels and a date certain so farmers and developers of biofuel refineries know there's a market for their product.

- **Energy Freedom Fund.** This new program within the Department of Agriculture will provide low-cost financing for the infrastructure needed to create biofuels.

New laws protect our land, air and water

- **Recycling "E-waste."** Improperly disposed e-waste can release dangerous heavy metals into the environment. We passed a bill that calls for manufacturers of TVs, computers and monitors to establish and fund collection and recycling programs for unwanted items in each county in Washington.



- **Lowering phosphates.** Phosphates spur the growth of algae in lakes and rivers, resulting in ailing or dead fish. Washington became the first state to phase out the amount of phosphates in automatic dishwashing detergent.

■ Eliminating state park fees.

Responding to a dramatic decrease in state park attendance since fees were initiated, we repealed the unpopular \$5 parking fee.

- **Cleaning up Puget Sound.** Puget Sound is an irreplaceable natural and economic asset of both regional and national importance. The budget includes \$57 million to help protect, restore and revitalize it through better oil-spill response, wastewater treatment, toxic site cleanup and salmon restoration.





Fixing Our Transportation System

By rejecting Initiative 912 last November, voters affirmed the transportation funding package we passed last session. The principle funding challenges in 2006 are the rise of fuel, labor and construction costs. The supplemental budget we passed this session makes adjustments to deal with these challenges and enacts policies to improve safety, preserve at-risk roads and bridges, and enhance the state's economy.

Regional transportation bill aims to ease traffic gridlock, settle Viaduct debate

For too long, competition between road and transit initiatives has stalled headway on fixing central Puget Sound's most congested choke points.

To change this, I helped push through a measure that fosters the necessary partnership between local regions (as well as on federal and state levels) by requiring that the Regional Transportation Investment District (RTID) and Sound Transit propose projects for a single 2007 ballot. Both measures are required to pass for either to be approved.

Also, RTID funding may now be used for transit and passenger ferries,

rather than strictly road projects. For example, while the Alaskan Way Viaduct is being replaced, we could add more ferry runs, water taxi service and bus routes to ease the additional traffic congestion we're sure to face.

The bill includes a provision to help settle the debate about the future of the Viaduct. The Seattle City Council must pass a resolution to either rebuild the Viaduct or replace it with a tunnel, otherwise a citywide advisory vote will take place this November.

King County may run passenger-only ferries

Passenger ferries are vital to Vashon Island, but also to the entire region because they keep cars off the road. Yet every year, financial and political pressures put our service at risk.

When Initiative 695 passed, the ferry system lost its primary source of revenue for passenger ferries and began to eliminate runs. Strong leadership from the 34th District legislative delegation has kept Vashon's service intact – but ours is the only one left, so it's always a target.

To ensure the long-term future of Vashon's passenger ferry service, we asked King County Metro to

submit a plan for taking it over. I made sure the following conditions apply:

- At a minimum, King County must maintain the existing level of service.
- King County must continue to use union workers.
- A state fund is established to help keep fares affordable and make necessary improvements to service levels and capital costs, including the purchase of new, more fuel-efficient boats.
- No interruption of service can occur. The state must continue to run the ferries until King County can take them over.

Vashon schools receive bicycle, pedestrian safety aid

I helped secure \$236,500 for McMurray Middle School and Chautauqua Elementary School to increase students' safety when they walk or bike to schools. Improvements will include the installation of sidewalks, crosswalks, signage, lighting and bicycle racks. This "safe routes to school" money also funds an education curriculum, which includes a bicycle safety program and a walking/pedometer program.



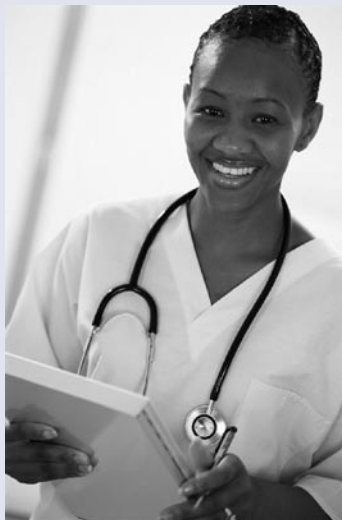
Revitalizing White Center

The King County Housing Authority is redeveloping the former Park Lake Homes public housing project in White Center. The new development, now known as Greenbridge, will provide quality housing as well as employment and educational opportunities for the community. To help keep this project on schedule, this session I helped secure \$400,000, which comes in addition to the \$200,000 it received last session. Greenbridge is similar to the economically and ethnically diverse High Point, another exciting revitalization project in West Seattle that is also on track for state assistance.

Delridge Weed & Seed Wins State Funding

The goal of Weed & Seed is to “weed” out violent crime while “seeding” in social service programs. West Seattle’s Delridge area has been identified as one of the areas that could benefit from Weed & Seed funding. Because the federal government left out funding in their budget for Weed & Seed next year, I fought for \$250,000 in state money, which will be split evenly between the Delridge and Rainier Beach sites, and can be leveraged by locally raised funds.

Expanding Access to Health Care, Backfilling Federal Cuts



Last session we began to make a commitment to insure all children in Washington by 2010. This session, we made even more improvements:

■ **Basic Health Plan (BHP) expansion.** An additional 6,500 low-income adults will be able to enroll in the BHP, bringing total enrollment in this affordable plan to 106,500.

■ **Children’s Health Insurance.** This year’s budget provides additional funding so 10,000 more children can be covered through the Immigrant Children’s Health Program.

■ **Medicare prescription drug co-pays.** With the implementation of the new federal prescription drug benefit in January, about 100,000 of the state’s most medically vulnerable residents were transferred from the Medicaid program to the federal Medicare for prescription drug coverage. Thanks to new funding in the state budget, these low-income seniors, known as “dual eligibles,” will not have to pay the \$1 to \$5 co-pays for their medicines – co-pays they didn’t have to pay under Medicaid.



■ **Mental health treatment.** We backfilled \$46 million in federal cuts to both Medicaid and non-Medicaid eligible public mental health services and addressed King County’s shortfall from last session.

Other Key Bills — Did They Pass?

	Passed	Failed
Medical malpractice Doctors and lawyers agreed to mandatory arbitration before a lawsuit can proceed, and both sides can agree to binding arbitration.	✓	
Tougher sentences for sex offenders Sets a 25-year minimum sentence for certain cases of child rape or molestation, improves community notification, and increases penalties for offenders who fail to register as well as people who create, watch or possess child porn.	✓	
Tackling the meth epidemic Approves multi-jurisdictional meth task forces, establishes a pilot program to combat drug trafficking and use in three rural areas of the state, and gives local authorities more tools to clean up properties contaminated by meth labs.	✓	
Improving the WASL Allows alternative assessments for students who have retaken the WASL at least once, funds intensive instruction for students who are unable to meet academic standards and studies barriers to academic success.	✓	
Fair Share health care Also dubbed the “Wal Mart bill,” it would have required large employers to spend more on health care for its employees. Stalled in the House; will be reintroduced next year.		✓
Key Arena upgrades, NASCAR The Legislature never voted on the Sonics’ proposal to pay for \$220 million in Key Arena improvements by extending the existing “tourist tax,” which is set to expire, nor did we act on NASCAR’s proposal for the state to help fund a \$345 million racetrack in Kitsap County.		✓
Cell phones in cars I voted to ban talking on a handheld cell phone while driving, but the measure did not pass the House.		✓



Washington Learns: Binding our early education, K-12, and higher-ed systems together

Washington Learns, which passed into law last session with my support, is a comprehensive process to create a “strong education system that will provide an educated citizenry and a thriving economy” in the state. It seeks answers to some of the most pressing issues facing our education system:

- Are we adequately supporting families of very young children to ensure that every child is prepared from birth to succeed in school?
- Are all students achieving proficiency in reading, writing and mathematics?
- Is a 70 percent high school graduation rate good enough?
- Is our education system designed for the digital, global, knowledge-driven and culturally pluralist age?
- Are we spending current dollars efficiently and effectively?
- Are we investing enough to educate our citizens?

Here’s some of the progress we’ve made thus far:

- 1.** The Washington Learns Interim Report recommended creating a cabinet-level department of early learning. Legislation passed this session creates this department and consolidates more than a half-dozen child care and early learning programs. The new department will work with the private sector to coordinate investments and improve coordination between early learning and K-12.
- 2.** Washington Learns recommended investing in intensive, focused, academic support for high school students who need extra help to meet the state’s academic requirements in reading, writing and math. Legislation passed this session gives schools and classroom teachers additional resources for summer school, skill seminars, test preparation, tutoring and other tools to help students who have been unsuccessful in meeting standards.

3. Washington Learns recommended new career pathways that lead to apprenticeships after graduation. Legislation passed this session provides school districts with “Running Start” grants to prepare interested students for the building trades and crafts. These are just a few of the recommendations we’ve already taken action on. In addition, we’re making headway on paying teachers and school employees what they deserve. This year’s budget funds teacher and school employee pay raises missed when Initiative 732 wasn’t funded in 2003 due to a budget shortfall. And in the past two years, we’ve added 8,400 enrollment slots at our colleges and universities. Washington Learns will issue its final report this fall. I’ll keep working to make sure its recommendations are passed into law.

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